
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
THE BASIC SCHOOL
MARINE CORPS TRAINING COMMAND
CAMP BARRETT, VIRGINIA 22134-5019

ROLE OF THE CHAPLAIN

W0S0005XQ

STUDENT HANDOUT

Role of the Chaplain

Introduction

The Chaplain Corps is directed to provide religious ministry and ensure the free exercise of religion for military members and their dependents. Knowing your Marines and their spiritual condition is as important as knowing their performance level. The Chaplain is here to assist you in knowing your Marines.

Importance

Having a Chaplain Corps is of vital importance to maintaining religious freedom within the Department of Defense. It serves not to force faith on Sailors and Marines but to guarantee that they may worship while serving their country.

In This Lesson

Some of the information in this lesson can give you, as a leader, an edge on understanding the purposes for having chaplains and what their roles are while serving as special staff officers. Also, this lesson discusses the entire religious ministry concept and how it can help you as a company grade officer.

This lesson covers the following topics:

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Learning Objectives

Terminal learning objectives

TBS-LDR-1001 Given an evaluation, identify sources of social services, without omitting key components.

TBS-VALU-1010 While part of a unit, describe actions to prevent suicide without omitting key components.

Enabling Learning Objectives

TBS-LDR-1001d Given a scenario, identify chaplain's role as a resource, to help a Marine.

Enabling Learning Objectives (Continued)

TBS-LDR-1001h Given an evaluation, identify elements of a Religious Ministry Team, without omission

TBS-VALU-1010a Without the aid of reference, identify suicide warning signs to determine if someone is suicidal.

TBS-VALU-1010c Without the aid of reference, identify suicide prevention resources without omission.

The Chaplain

The Chaplain serves as an ethical and spiritual advisor to the commanding officer and as a pastor, counselor, and educator to the command. Chaplains provide religious services and/or sacraments to those of their own faith group. They also facilitate the free exercise of religion of those of other faith groups while providing care and counsel to all regardless of religious affiliation.

Chaplains are members of the clergy who volunteer to minister within the military service. They bring special talents and abilities to the battlefield that are extremely useful to the commander. They have a unique viewpoint of the human soul. This ability to provide soulful care is a force multiplier to the commander that many do not fully utilize. Your chaplains are another set of eyes on the welfare of your unit. Also, seek them for your own benefit. They can often be a source of unbiased, wise counsel.

With the understanding of the chaplain's role, the most important thing to remember is that *all* meetings with the chaplain are completely confidential.

Command Religious Program and Social Services

The commanding officer of the unit to which the chaplain is assigned is responsible for the Command Religious Program. The Command Religious Program consists of these tasks:

- Advising the commanding officer and other members of the command on religious and morale issues.
- Conducting divine services and administering the sacraments.
- Pastoral care and counseling.
- Deck plate ministry (workspace, field, hospital visits, etc.).
- Religious education (Bible study, baptisms, marriage seminars).
- Professional military education (PME) on subjects such as suicide prevention, ethics/core values, combat stress management, warrior transition, world religions, and pre-and post-deployment briefs.
- Ensure all Marines are able, within operational constraints, to practice their religious faith, regardless of creed.

Command Religious Program and Social Services (Continued)

- The Chaplain can also assist the Family Readiness Officer by facilitating social services available to your Marines, to include:
 - Navy and Marine Corps Relief Society
 - Marine Corps Family Service Centers
 - Military One Source
 - Exceptional Family Member Program
 - Education Programs

Religious Ministry Team

The religious ministry team (RMT) consists of chaplains, religious program specialists (RPs), and volunteer lay leaders from the unit.

Religious Program Specialist

RPs are not required to be religious. They assist the chaplain daily providing support which may include but is not limited to

- Providing administrative support.
- High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) licensed driving.
- M16 and pistol qualified due to combatant status. Chaplains are non-combatants; therefore, the RP protects the chaplain in a hostile situation.
- Rig for services whether in a chapel or in a field environment.

Volunteer Lay Leaders

The right to free exercise of religion ensures that individuals belonging to a faith group with no chaplain present can worship according to their own tradition. Command endorsed lay leaders normally function in expeditionary settings; e.g., in the field, on board ship. However, lay leaders may function in garrison if their faith group is not represented in the base chapel or community.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide is the leading cause of death in the Marine Corps. While the chaplain is the subject matter expert on suicide prevention, the Marine Corps views suicide prevention as the responsibility of the entire Marine Corps community and it is the duty of Marines, family members, and friends to encourage those who are troubled to seek help.

• Early Warning

Some signs that your Marines are struggling with suicide are included but not limited to:

Suicide Prevention (Continued)

- Withdrawal
- Preparing to Die (giving away belongings, saying goodbye to family and friends)
- Looking for Ways to Die
- Change in Personality or Emotions, Behaviors, Sleep Patterns, or Eating Habits.
- Low Self-Esteem
- No Hope for future

Some risk factors that could leave to your Marines having suicidal behavior can be noticed if they are struggling with:

- Relationship problems
- Legal or Work Problems
- Family History of Suicide
- Alcohol or drug use
- History of Physical or Sexual Abuse
- Social Isolation
- Physical illness
- Depression
- Past Suicide Behavior
- History of Violence or Hostility
- Unwillingness to seek help
- Access to means to kill oneself

- **Prevention**

As leaders, there are many ways to help our Marines who are struggling with suicide. Be willing to listen to their issues, share your concern for their well-being. If a Marine is struggling with suicidal thoughts, never leave them alone, and ensure they receive professional help immediately. In addition to the chain of command, seek help through:

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline
- Military OneSource
- Suicide Hotline 1-800-SUICIDE
- DCoE Outreach Call Center
- HQMC Suicide Prevention
- Leaders Guide for Managing Marines in Distress
- Marine Corps Suicide Prevention Program

In the event of a Marine displaying suicidal thoughts, utilize the steps in R. A. C. E.

Recognize distress in your Marine. Note changes in personality, emotions or behavior.

Ask your Marine. Calmly question and if necessary ask directly, “Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

Suicide Prevention (Continued)

Care for your Marine. Don't judge, control situation peacefully and keep everyone safe.

Escort your Marine. Stay with your buddy and escort to chain of command chaplain, medical, or behavioral health professional.

Summary

This lesson has covered the role of the chaplain, the command religious program, and the religious ministry team. In addition, early warning signs, risk factors, and resources to aid in suicide prevention. These are valuable resources for you at TBS and as future leaders of Marines.

References

Reference Number or Author	Reference Title
MCO 3500.44B	Religious Ministry Team Training and Readiness Manual
MCCS Website	Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS) Website

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Term or Acronym	Definition or Identification
PME	Professional Military Education
RMT	Religious Ministry Team
RP	Religious Program Specialist
HMM1\N	High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle

Notes
